New York Theatre Critics' Reviews 1956

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NEW YORK JOURNAL-AMERICAN
NEW YORK DAILY NEWS
NEW YORK POST
NEW YORK MIRROR
NEW YORK WORLD TELEGRAM & THE SUN
NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE
NEW YORK TIMES

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"Happy Hunting"

New York Post

December 7, 1956

By Richard Watts Jr.

Welcome Return of Ethel Merman

Having no more objection to the old-fashioned type of musical comedy than I have, Ethel Merman, one of America's great national sources of energy, belted her way through "Happy Hunting" last night with her customary brilliant aplomb. Since Miss Merman is just as wonderful as ever, and her new vehicle, which opened at the Majestic Theater amid fairly glittering surroundings, has good looks, pace, vitality and some agreeable if unremarkable songs, it is evident that the season possesses another girl-and-music hit, and I think it's an entertaining one.

When it was first announced that Howard Lindsay and Russel Crouse were going to write a musical show dealing with the revenge of a Philadelphia hostess, who felt she had been snubbed at the recent Kelly-Rainier nuptials and was determined to arrange a more impressive wedding for her own daughter, the first reaction was that it was a fine satirical idea. The second was one of wondering how the talented authors would go on from there and what they would do with their idea. It is now possible to answer the query. They don't do much of anything with it.

The Romance

Instead, they pretty much drop the whole scheme halfway through the first act, and go on to tell us how the hostess falls in love with the handsome Spanish grandee she had purchased for her ingenue daughter, while the daughter is deciding that she prefers a young Philadelphia lawyer. It does seem rather a shame that the potentialities of satire were dismissed in the interest of a more conventional plot, but, since I'm firmly convinced that there is room in the theater for an old-fashioned musical comedy without pretensions, I don't really mind.

What really matters is that, whenever either what is left of the satire or the standard plot threatens to raise its head, Miss Merman is in there putting over a song in her best tumultuous style, or the good-looking and attractively eager chorus girls are swinging into action, and an infectious air of gaiety takes over. The star even does a number with a trained horse, which is not only swaggeringly courageous of her but works out well. I, for one, don't especially care that the art of the musical show isn't being advanced when Miss Merman is in evidence.

Songs and Chorus

The score is by Harold Karr, with whose previous work I must confess unfamiliarity, and it seemed to me pleasant and tuneful without being notable. The same goes for the lyrics of Matt Dubey. I believe my favorite song is a duet called "Mutual Admiration," which is none the less engaging for having a distantly reminiscent ring. Jo Mielziner's sets are attractive, and I felt I was going to like the chorus when the first girl appeared prettily in the first scene. Abe Burrows' staging gives the proper zest to the proceedings, and the plot isn't ostentatious.

With or without her horse, Miss Merman is dynamic, humorous, immensely likable and even rather touching. In brief, she's Ethel Merman, and a very welcome sight. The Spanish princeling is Fernando Lamas, who has just the right air of handsome dignity without any accompanying stuffiness. Virginia Gibson, who plays the daughter, is an attractive ingenue with talent and freshness, and Gordon Polk is a refreshingly unconventional juvenile. Don't expect satire in "Happy Hunting." But, as a vehicle for one of the stage's most remarkable talents, it's fun.

"HAPPY HUNTING"

Musical comedy with book by Howard Lindsay and Russel Crouse, lyrics by Matt Dubey, music by Harold Karr; staged by Abe Burrows; settings and lighting by Jo Mielziner; costumes by Irene Sharaff; dances and musical numbers staged by Alex Pomero and Bob Herget; musical direction by Jay Blackton; orchestrations by Ted Royal; presented by Mr. Mielziner at the Majestic Theatre, December 6, 1956. The cast:

Sanford Stewart Jr.....Gordon Polk
Mrs. Sanford Stewart Sr.....Olive Templeton
Joseph.....Mitchell M. Gregg
Beth Livingstone..Virginia Gibson
Harry Watson.....Gene Wesson
Liz Livingstone..Ethel Merman
Maud Foley.....Mary Finney
Arturo.....Leon Belasco
Duke of Granada..Fernando Lamas
Count Carlos.....Renato Cibelli
Ship's Officer.....John Leslie
Mrs. B.....Florence Dunlap
Mrs. D.....Madeleine Clive
Mrs. L.....Kelley Stephens
Mr. M.....Jay Velie

Journal American

December 7, 1956

Incredible Merman Weaves Her Magic

By JOHN McCLAIN

A CHAP CAN BECOME kind of truant and forgetful about Ethel Merman. She isn't around on Broadway for a certain length of time, several seasons go by without her, and a fellow starts to talk about new faces and pretends that everything's all right, knowing all the time that it really isn't.

But then she comes back, as she did last night in "Happy Hunting," the new musical that opened at the Majestic, and the guy wonders how the town survived so long without her amazing magic. For she is ageless and individual; she can still sell a song better than anybody in the business.

This new Russel Crouse-Howard Lindsay musical is by no means the happiest material she's ever dealt with; neither is the score by Matt Dubey and Harold Karr. But it doesn't matter. "Big Merm" just simply gets out there and takes charge, she swaggers and struts, her numbers can be heard comfortably in Hohokus, N. J., and when she delivers a joke line she will come down in the audience and hit you with a juvenile if you don't laugh. She is plainly the greatest.

Workable Story

This current effort, as you've heard, is based on the Kelly-Rainier nuptials and a highly hoked-up story of a matching member of European royalty and the daughter of a socially non-acceptable Philadelphia mother. It is a workable if not ingenious background, providing scenes in Monaco, aboard ship, in a Main Line mansion, at a hunt club, etc. It permits Ethel to wear a variety of brilliant and comic costumes and produces the usual big numbers. It is expensively and tastefully produced, the girls are decorative and Abe Burrows, who directed, keeps the action going at a strenuous pace.

Coupled with Miss Merman is Fernando Lamas, as the legendary pretender to the throne of Spain, and he is excellent. He is handsome, has a truly important voice, and an assured and attractive presence. He will race many feminine motors around the town for some moons to come.

As the daughter Virginia Gibson is pert and pretty and can sing and dance. She has one big memorable number with Ethel called "Mutual Admiration Society" and if you haven't already heard it, you will.

Stout support is also offered by Gordon Polk, who has an appealing voice; Mary Finney, always the inveterate "friend;" Leon Belasco; Olive Templeton and Renato Cibelli.

Jo Mielziner, who both produced and designed the show has complemented himself creditably; and a special garland should be flung in the direction of Irene Sharaff for the costumes, especially the exotic and original clothes worn by Mr. Lamas.

"Happy Hunting" is going to be a big booming success, and another tribute to the incredible talents of Ethel Merman.

NEW YORK Herald Tribune
December 7, 1956

THEATER

'Happy Hunting'

By WALTER KERR

THE friends of Ethel Merman assembled in less than solemn conclave at the Majestic Thursday night to welcome their girl back home. As a matter of fact, it's not so much that they were her friends as that they became her friends every time she opened her great big mouth.

• • •

How can you resist an unladylike Kewpie-doll with sunrise eyes, tadpole eyebrows, and rhinestones all over her toes—who rolls in from the wings, winds up her head like a pitcher getting ready to win the ball game, and fixes you with a blinking stare that's like something seen at night in a very dark forest? Owls can't do it, but Miss Merman can.

What is there left but rapt admiration for a kid who can teeter around on heels high enough to dwarf a pair of stilts, who can suddenly drop her head in such noisy shame that the plunk can be heard in the balcony, who can announce that she's got forty million and it ain't asparagus tips and double you up on the spot?

• • •

The thing about Merman is that she doesn't need comedy because she just naturally drips comedy the way some trees drip maple syrup. Lines? Who needs lines? Her tone is funny, her attitude (whatever it may be at any slapdash moment) is funny, her simple presence in the neighborhood is humor itself.

So she says to her unhappy daughter, "You always feel better when I buy you a horse," and it's lovely. She looks at a handsome pretender to the Spanish throne on a clear day in Monaco and she says, "He's a foreigner—everywhere but here he's a foreigner." That's nice, too. And when, having lugged her titled conquest to these shores and enveigled him into a hunt, she begins to discourse on the mating habits of foxes, you know you're listening to an intuitive stylist who could give the bum's rush to Henry James. A glorious creature, capable of saying "What the hell!" in twenty different inflections and making celestial melody out of all of them.

• • •

Not a word against Merman, then. But we still have a problem to consider. What kind of a Merman show is a show that never gives Merman the chance to stop it—not once? (This remark is subject to correction; a deadline kept this admirer from hearing the living bugle's very last number, but up till then the customary explosion hadn't happened.)

Composer Harold Karr and lyricist Matt Dubey have managed to squeeze out two reasonably agreeable tunes, or at least tune-ideas: a breezy duet for mother and daughter called "Mutual Admiration Society," and a tango on a jammed dance-floor that operates vertically only. Otherwise the score is a kind of musical plain-talk made up of literal lyrics ("When the game of love begins, and the wheel of romance spins") and notes that keep jumping up and down on beat but don't seem to speak pleasantly to one another as they pass.

Whatever the cause, they don't catch fire. The star opens those pipes, and she wiggles as she warbles. But the steam won't build to a blowoff, and a Merman extravaganza without a roundhouse roar to tie up the proceedings is, if there was one, a flat contradiction in terms.

• • •

It is too much to ask that the Howard Lindsay-Russell Crouse book should make up the atomic deficiency. Books don't do that. On its own terms, this one ambles along in a way that is surely going to be called old-fashioned (it is old-fashioned; one of its biggest gags is a bit that helped Fannie Brice black-out a sketch twenty years ago). But it might have passed muster in a show that was blowing up musically every twenty minutes or so; in the surroundings, it just seems slightly sleepy. Director Abe Burrows has brushed it by with a not very urgent hand.

Back to the credit side: Virginia Gibson is as trim and pretty an ingenue as ever came out of a pre-"Boy Friend" musical; Fernando Lamas is comfortably dashing as a silver-haired romantic hero; it's good to see lanky Mary Martin in clothes designed by Irene Sharaff, for once; and Jo Mielziner's settings are airy and buoyant everywhere.

The balance? Merman is Merman. But the roof is still on at the Majestic, and that's not right.

The New York Times
December 7, 1956

Theatre: Return of Ethel Merman

She Rocks Broadway in 'Happy Hunting'

By BROOKS ATKINSON

THE explosion in Forty-fourth Street last evening was nothing to be alarmed by. It was merely Ethel Merman returning to the New York theatre and being welcomed by her friends.

After wasting six years of our lives she has come back in "Happy Hunting," which opened at the Majestic last evening. Howard Lindsay and Russel Crouse, who wrote her last show, "Call Me Madam," have put this one together with a minimum of originality and enterprise. Step by step the Broadway theatre is getting back to the mechanical mishmash of the old standard Shubert musical.

But the Merman is as swagger and brassy as ever, glowing like a neon light whenever she steps on the stage, full of self-confidence and band concert music. Mr. Lindsay and Mr. Crouse have cast her as a rich Philadelphian who is not accepted by Main Line society, but snares a royal duke who outranks Grace Kelly's husband. As a story this one is old-fashioned fare with jokes that are not much more sprightly.

But the authors, the audience and the star no doubt agree that the chief purpose of a book is to get Miss Merman out there in center stage, bawling Harold Karr's songs into the gallery. The part is thoroughly becoming. For it gives her a chance to startle the rich with her exuberant vulgarity, fall in love with breezy informality, play fabulous host to the audience and sing very loud in stirring rhythms.

•

"I've got that proverbial glow," she bellows in one of Matt Dubey's happiest lyrics. Like the authors of the book, the composer has given her a score that is hardly more than adequate. But Miss Merman pitches into it with her familiar gusto. By the time she is through you have a definite impression that you have been considerably sung at.

Who is the Duke of Granada who outranks Grace Kelly's husband? He is Fernando Lamas, tall, dark and handsome, with agreeable manners and an excellent singing voice. To be glamorous on the musical stage today a man had better powder his head gray if it is not already aged by itself. Mr. Lamas belongs in that irresistible age group. As Miss Merman's atomic missile he is wholly satisfactory and a valuable property in the midst of a mediocre show.

"Happy Hunting" has all the appurtenances of a big show. It is a "24 carat utopian giganticum," in the circus vocabulary of Bill Nye. It has abundant and entrancing scenery by Joe Mielziner; costumes by Irene Sharaff that are either saucy or stunning, according to the mood; pleasant dances staged by Alex Romero and Bob Herget; direction by Abe Burrows, and a number of good actors and stimulating chorus girls. The secondary leads are attractively played and sung by Gordon Polk and Virginia Gibson.

But it is easy for almost anyone to be invisible when Miss Merman is on the premises. Those she doesn't outdazzle, she outsings. And where the book limps, she swings along like a syncopated parade. Welcome home, Miss Merman. The neighborhood is always a little more jaunty when you are here.

DAILY NEWS

December 7, 1956

'Happy Hunting' a Lucky Show To Have Ethel Merman Its Star

By JOHN CHAPMAN

Fortunately for "Happy Hunting," the musical which had a tally-ho opening last evening at the Majestic Theatre, Ethel Merman retains her lusty spirit. Fortunately also, there is an ingratiating performanee by Fernando Lamas and a charming one by Virginia Gibson. If it werent for these three, "Happy Hunting" would be an undistinguished musical.

The authors, Howard Lindsy and Russel Crouse, have started with a plot idea which must once have been both timely and satiric—the plight of a wealthy Philadelphia widow who doesn't get invited to the Grace Kelly-Prince Rainier wedding and who, by way of revenge, schemes to marry her own daughter to bigger royal game, the pretender to the throne of Spain. Time flies and satire subsides, and I think Miss Kelly dealt "Happy Hunting" a grievous blow when she became an expectant mother.

Miss Merman does her dauntless best in the role of the widow. She snares Lamas for her daughter, Miss Gibson, and then proceeds to fall in love with him herself. This Castilian prince is named Jaime, and it is a joy to hear Miss Merman come close to the Spanish pronunciation by calling him Hymie. It is good to hear her take hold of a song, even when it isn't a very good song.

Lamas moves easily through the plot and sings with a very agreeable voice, and Miss Gibson does a fetching song-and-dance number in which she toys with a beach ball, and such comedians as Leon Belasco and Mary Finney are on hand to add some fun if possible. Gordon Polk also is pleasant in the role of a modest young Philadelphia lawyer.

Couple of Jingles

If "Happy Hunting" is not as happy as all of us had hoped it would be, qdite a bit of the disappointment must be credited to Harold Karr and Matt Dubey, who wrote the music and lyrics. They have an entertaining jingle in "Mutual Admiration Society" and a rhyme-and-rhythm song called "Everyone Who's Who's Who" which makes a jolly point, but their score strikes me as being generally routine.

Jo Mielziner, the producer, has designed the sets, and as a careful producer has not let himself get out of hand. Neither has Abe Burrows, the director, who has gone carefully down the middle of the musical comedy road.

New York World-Telegram and The Sun

December 7, 1956

The Mighty Ethel Lights Up the Sky

By TOM DONNELLY.

In the theater, Ethel Merman reduces me to a rapturous pulp, and she makes me feel all thumbs at my typewriter. Telling the world that Ethel Merman is great is like telling the world that Niagara Falls makes a big splash. When you've said that Ethel has returned to Broadway in "Happy Hunting" (at the Majestic) you've said all that anybody really needs to know.

And, who doesn't know that Ethel is back where she belongs? Those crowds who lined up to get tickets certainly know. Why, the whole town must know who put that electricity in the air. It wasn't there until Ethel opened her mouth last night and started rattling her tonsils in that marvelous way she has. Does anyone seriously doubt that Ethel Merman is the great lady of the show world? Any such doubter can't be serious.

A Few Details.

Well, I can't just sit here in an awed reverie. I may as well put down a few details, superfluous though they are.

To begin with a style note, this is the season when the old-fashioned book is all the rage on the popular musical stage. Howard Lindsay and Russel Crouse have turned out a veritable Model-T in "Happy Hunting." Ethel gives it the gas and away we go in a cloud of happy dust.

Ethel is a Philadelphia matron who is so incensed when she and her daughter aren't invited to the Kelly-Rainier nuptials in Monaco that she buys a duke for her little girl and prepares to launch a wedding carnival on her own. What happens next? Give up?

Ensuing Complications.

Why, Ethel falls for the duke herself and the ensuing complications last until approximately a half hour before the final curtain, at which point "Happy Hunting" collapses with a kind of daring audacity that will set the oldsters to recalling how they used to put musicals together in the golden days of "Sunny" and "Polly" and "Stop It, Suzanne!" and "Oh, You Naughty Minniehaha!"

Until It Gets Lost.

Ethel is just the girl to kick a book like this around until it gets lost. She tears into the dialogue with a massive enthusiasm that makes the feeblest line sound brilliantly robust. Informed that in Monaco they say "His Grace," they mean prince and not Miss Kelly, Ethel Merman bellows forth in astonishment: "Oh, is his name Grace, too?" and creates the illusion that she has just delivered the joke of the century.

In the course of a joyous evening, Ethel outwits the thieves of Monaco by wearing all her jewels to bed; she puts on a display of mother love that makes "Stella Dallas" look like an unmaternal monster; she has a long heart-to-heart talk with a horse—a real horse — and steals the scene from the beautiful and talented beast; she grandly bids French servants to enter her presence with a cry of "N' est-ce pas!"; and, when it seems that she may not land her man, Ethel gushes forth a fountain of sorrow that could drown any 20 blues singers you might care to name.

Ethel is the star of stars, but it is only right and just to concede that her vehicle has its points, too. In its reactionary way "Happy Hunting" is a genuine musical comedy, designed to afford a lot of people a lot of opportunities. Barring an occasional clinker, the songs by Matt Dubey and Harold Carr are brisk and attractive ("Mutual Admiration Society" is already an established hit, I believe); Fernando Lamas is a dashing and melodious leading man; Virginia Gibson sings and dances with breezy charm as the daughter in the case, and Gordon Polk acquits himself agreeably as the young lawyer who loses his Philadelphia inhibitions at her prodding; Mary Finney and Olive Templeton are highly amusing as, respectively, Ethel's oldest friend and worst enemy.

The choreography is minor but reasonably lively, and the ladies of the ensemble are a toothsome lot. Producer Jo Mielziner has contributed a carload of gaudily cheerful scenery, and director Abe Burrows has kept the proceedings moving at a good fast clip. Up until that second-act, say, that is.

Now about that Ethel Merman. She is monumental, magnificent, and miraculous. Can anyone else touch her when it comes to demonstrating absolute mastery of the musical stage? Certainly not! Can anyone think of a new way to describe the glory of her voice, a way which would not involve the standard comparison with a brass band? I wish I could.

Daily Mirror

December 7, 1956

Robert Coleman's THEATRE:

'Happy Hunting' Is A Merman Mirthquake

• Ethel overwhelming in this sassy, satiric songfest at the Majestic.

"Happy Hunting" is going to provide a field day for the tax collector. Opening at the Majestic Theatre on Thursday evening to an advance of over $2,000,000, it put a big, broad smile on the faces of all who had had the foresight to buy their tickets weeks and months ago.

Jo Mielziner, who makes his bow as a producer with this one, will be getting the glad hand from the prexy of his bank, for he's going to be an important depositor over the next few years. Authors Howard Lindsay and Russel Crouse, tunesmiths Matt Dubey and Harold Karr also will join the ranks of the plutocrats.

• • •

LINDSAY AND CROUSE have a knack for capitalizing on the news. When Perle Mesta became Minister to Luxembourg, they penned "Call Me Madam." Now they're having fun with a wedding that recently rocked Monaco. It seems that Liz Livingstone took her daughter, Beth, over to the minute principality for the festivities.

When they got the royal brush-off from Their Serene Highnesses, Liz decided to buy a title for her disappointed daughter. She snagged a pretender to the Spanish throne who would listen to wedding bells for a price. Since the magnificent Ethel Merman is impersonating the clever Liz, you know as well as we do who winds up with the Duke of Granada.

La Merman is one of the theatre's titans. She's a real take-over gal, with the drive and authority of a five-star general. She can belt the bejabbers out of a good song, and she's got several to work her lusty magic on this time out.

The Liz that Ethel plays inherited four million bucks from her late Philadelphia husband and parlayed it into 40. When Mainliners gave her the snub, she bowled 'em over like Bronco Nagurski used to do with optimistic tacklers on the gridiron. Heck, she doesn't just play Liz. She is Liz to the life!

FERNANDO LAMAS, of the films, is quite charming and likable as the Duke without a dime. Virginia Gibson, as the daughter willing to sacrifice a crest for a Philly counselor, is the most captivating ingenue to reach the Rialto since Julie Andrews. Gordon Polk, as an earnest young disciple of Blackstone; Mary Finney, as a wonderfully sharp-tongued grande dame; and Leon Belasco, as a hotel proprietor too generous with the cuff, are other standouts.

Manager Mielziner, who raised the dough for the Merman merry-maker, has designed some of those lavish and costly sets that win him prizes, come award-distributing time. Irene Sharaff has turned out scads of tasteful, colorful costumes from her atelier. And Abe Burrows has brought his wizardry to the staging of the town's new top ticket.

Let's face it, when the kudos are being handed out, you've got to doff your chapeau to Merman. Her vitality and know-how are as impressive as Niagara Falls. She overwhelms you with her dynamic personality. And the customers can't complain that they don't hear the lyrics when she blazes 'em across the footlights.

"Happy Hunting" is a Merman mirthquake. Tuneful, sassy and satiric, it offers happy hilarity hunting for the holidays. And we mean the holidays of 1956, '57, '58—oh, fill in the rest yourself! It's a smasher, old bean, a smasher!

"Mister Roberts"

New York World-Telegram and The Sun

December 6, 1956

'Mister Roberts' Shipshape

By TOM DONNELLY.

Any man, woman, or child, who has missed seeing "Mister Roberts" on stage or screen because of fire, flood, or quarantine, will find an agreeable production of the marathon comedy at the City Center.

In the pursuit of my professional duties, I have inspected "Mister Roberts" at least half a dozen times before, prior to Broadway, on Broadway, on the road, with and without Henry Fonda, with John Forsythe, and with Tod Andrews. And once, with a chap whose name escapes me completely.

It is quite a tribute to the durable qualities of this work, I think, that I was able to enjoy it all over again last night.

An Admirable Piece.

Time and circumstance have not altered the values of "Mister Roberts." The dramatization by Joshua Logan and the late Thomas Heggen of Mr. Heggen's book is not as lean and true as the original was, but, in its slicker broader, more sentimental fashion, it is unquestionably an admirable piece for the popular theater.

It is loud, funny, expertly designed, and it makes its serious commentary on the heroism of men who must suffer endless boredom in the course of a great conflict as entertainingly as possible.

All of the actors assembled for the City Center production give good accounts of themselves. Charlton Heston plays the title character with warmth and a kind of muscular intensity that is perhaps a touch solemn, but, nevertheless, fills the bill nicely. Orson Bean is immensely likable as that addle-pated shirker and scrounger, Ensign Pulver; Fred Clark is fine as the affable Doc, and William Harrigan effectively repeats his old role of the captain. The subordinate sailors—or, I suppose I should say, the insubordinate sailors—are lustily interpreted by a crew of Equity members who look wonderfully at home on the tattered deck of that U.S. Navy cargo ship doomed to sail from Apathy to Tedium and back again.

Successful Stage Debut.

I never had an opportunity to

"MISTER ROBERTS"

Comedy by Joshua Logan and Thomas Heggen, based on Mr. Heggen's novel; staged by John Forsythe; scenery and lighting based on designs by Jo Mielziner; presented by the New York City Theatre Company (Jean Dalrymple director) at the City Center; December 5, 1956. The cast:

Chief Johnson.....Joe Hardy
Lt. (jg) Roberts..Charlton Heston
Doc.....Fred Clark
Dowdy.....Frank Campanella
The Captain...William Harrigan
Insigna.....Joe Marcus
Mannion.....Jack De Mave
Lindstrom.....Rance Howard
Stefanowski.....Stanley Beck
Wiley.....Walter Massey
Schlemmer.....Dick Button
Reber.....Buddy Reynolds
Ensign Pulver.....Orson Bean
Dolan.....Walter Mathews
Gerhart.....Steve Pluta
Payne.....Clint Kimbrough
Lt. Ann Girard.....Nancy Berg
Shore Patrolman.....Jeff Harris
Military Policeman..David Davis
Shore Patrol Officer.....
Gerald H. Metcalfe

savor the art of Nancy Berg when she was engaged in showing thousands of television viewers how to retire gracefully, but I am pleased to report that the former star of "Count Sheep With Nancy Berg" makes an entirely successful stage debut in the only female role in "Mister Roberts." It's a small role, to be sure, but the novice Miss Berg is brilliantly convincing as a girl sailors would enjoy spying on via telescope. The veteran Dame Edith Evans couldn't have handled the assignment a fraction as authoritatively.

By the way, whenever I see a production of "Mister Roberts" I am reminded of the blast aimed at the play by a British critic who found it lacking in aesthetic quality. This critic said that the opening scene, wherein the sailors are observed happily studying the contours of some Navy nurses disporting themselves in the shower room of an island hospital, could have been raised to the level of true art if the playwrights had exercised a little imagination. If only a seagull had chanced to be passing by whenever the sailors were about to get an eyeful, the critic said, the scene would have been beautiful and poignant, instead of low and offensive.

Makes you think, doesn't it?

As I have already indicated, "Mister Roberts" suits me as written. The City Center version was directed, most ably, by John Forsythe, who obviously picked up all the necessary pointers during his long occupation of the leading part.

New York Post

December 6, 1956

By Richard Watts, Jr.

Good Revival of a Winning Comedy

As the third offering of its drama season, the City Center last night presented a revival of "Mister Roberts," and the celebrated comedy by Joshua Logan and Thomas Heggen continues to be an exceptionally entertaining example of wise theatrical craftsmanship. There is a genuine warm-heartedness in this play about the bored crew of a wartime cargo ship and its devotion to an understanding officer that mixes delightfully with its amiably rowdy hilarity and transforms it into not only a first-rate show but an immensely engaging and touching one.

Because "Mister Roberts" is so winning as sheer entertainment and its showmanship is so deft and expert, it is quite possible to lose sight of what a good, sound piece of dramatic writing it is. It may not be a play of especial distinction or artistic stature, but it is far more than merely a lively and amusing farcical fabrication. Its characters are drawn with not only humor and vividness but warmth and understanding, also, and its account of the unhappy crew's hero worship for its attractive central figure is oddly moving without being mawkish.

The Captain

Although the play has a villain in the person of the foolish and pig-headed old tyrant who is the ship's captain, it even finds time for understanding if not exactly sympathy for him. As William Harrigan, who created the role in the original company, skillfully plays him, there is something pathetic about the obnoxious officer, with his consciousness of inferiority, the bitterness thrust upon him by his hapless background, and his desperate, sullen loneliness, and, while you are glad to see him vanquished, he is far from being any melodramatic monster.

If, despite the general effectiveness of the current revival, the play is not quite as touching as it seemed originally, it is, I think, because Charlton Heston, who now has the title role, seemed a little too cocky and self confident to be completely believable as a man who would win the confidence and devotion of the tough sailors or go about making any sacrifices for them. It is an attractive performance that Mr. Heston offers, but I thought it was a trifle lacking in warmth and missed something of the appealing sympathy Henry Fonda gave to the part.

Now that I'm going in for a bit of quibbling about a highly serviceable production of a fine comedy, I must say that Orson Bean, who now has the role of the callow Ensign Pulver that David Wayne created so memorably, is occasionally inclined to be a little musical-comedy in his interpretation. Nevertheless, he succeeds in making the foolish but likable young fellow properly engaging. As the doctor, guide, philosopher and friend to Mister Roberts, Fred Clark has the required sense of austere warmth for the part and manages it with effectiveness and conviction.

As the Army nurse, who makes a brief and memorable appearance aboard the cargo ship, Nancy Berg, in her New York theatrical debut, plays with charm, grace and humor, giving authentic character to an infinitesimal part. Among the members of the crew, Frank Campanella, Walter Mathews, Joe Marcus, Jack De Mave, Rance Howard and Stanley Beck are convincing and real. "Mister Roberts" is a rich American comedy that deserves revival, and it's good to see it again at the City Center.

DAILY NEWS

December 6, 1956

'Mister Roberts' Again Hilarious In Fine Revival at the City Center

By DOUGLAS WATT

If you have forgotten what a wonderful play "Mister Roberts" is, as I had, all you have to do to refresh your memory is get over to the City Center where a spirited revival of the exhilarating Thomas Heggen-Joshua Logan comedy dropped anchor last night.

It's been almost nine years since the tatterdemalion crew of the Navy cargo vessel AK 601 first came to port here and a lot of things have changed in the world since then, but the appeal of this ship's company remains undimmed by time.

Waging the Good Fight.

Once again, Mister Roberts and his sturdy, though slovenly, crew are sitting out World War Two in a backwater of the Pacific, midway between Tedium and Apathy. And once more, they are waging their inspired battle against those twin enemies, boredom and the skipper.

And as you will recall, it is the restless Lt. Roberts, fond of the men under him but desperate to be transferred from the tin-can he is on to one in the thick of battle, who adds a touching note to the play. It is one of the many fine things about "Mister Roberts" that although news of the hero's death reaches us and the crew of the AK 601 only through a weeks-old letter, we mourn his loss along with his former shipmates because they've all become such close friends of ours.

No Complaints

It may be that the current production is, in comparison with the original, a trifle rough around the edges, but I don't intend to quibble with it: it's too good fun, just as it is.

Playing the title role, Charlton Heston looks every inch the understanding leader of this ragged ounch of seamen and he manages to work himself up to a convincing state of desperation when faced with the petty ultimatum of the captain, a role that is played here in the wonderfully nagging accents of William Harrigan, who created it on Broadway.

New Slant on Pulver

The new Ensign Pulver is Orson Bean, an able comedian whose glancing delivery of a funny line has a hilarious effect. And Fred Clark is fine as Doc, whose chief contribution to the well-being of the crew is his ability to supply gallons of raw alcohol for festive occasions.

John Forsythe, who followed Henry Fonda into the name part on Broadway, has directed the revival from a fond memory of Joshua Logan's original staging and done a good job of it, too. The solid-looking, realistic sets are recreations of Jo Mielziner's designs for the first production.

And last but not least, three cheers for all the crew members —Insigna, Mannion, Stefanowski and the rest.

Daily Mirror

December 6, 1956

Robert Coleman's THEATRE:

City Center Revives 'Mister Roberts'

• Lots of mileage still left in nautical comedy-drama.

"Mister Roberts" docked at the City Center on Wednesday evening for a stay of two weeks. The Joshua Logan-Thomas Heggen nautical comedy-drama is the getaway attraction of the New York Theatre Company's Winter season, following "Teahouse of the August Moon" and "Glass Menagerie" in West 55th Street.

This organization, under Jean Dalrymple's watchful eye, has been providing good plays with name players at bargain tariffs for several semesters. Stars, incidentally, work for Equity minimums to make the program possible. They merit bows for their civic-minded contributions.

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THE CITY CENTER'S opera company has run into difficulties. It's taking a Spring lay-off for re-organization. And the theatre company, in our opinion, isn't doing as well as it should. Perhaps a re-appraisal is in order here, too.

Though Miss Dalrymple has given us top-flight entertainment at reasonable rates, we wonder if "Teahouse" and "Roberts" were wise choices for the current stand. For excellent film versions of them are competing for patronage in our local movie houses.

Frankly, the U.S. Navy cargo ship, AK 601, seems a bit battered after its lengthy theatrical voyages. And its new crew appears to lack some of the zest for cruising that its predecessors had. This may be due to the fact that the City Center is a cavernous auditorium, in which high spirits can easily be dissipated.

Charlton Heston has replaced Henry Fonda and John Forsythe as the executive officer who desperately wants to leave his safe berth aboard a cargo tramp for duty on a fighting ship. He is earnest, handsome and likable, but fails to catch all the burning idealism and indignation that marked Fonda's performance.

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WILLIAM HARRIGAN is back on the bridge as the petulant, small-minded skipper determined to make Commander, if he has to break the morale of his subordinates to turn the trick. Orson Bean is the slap-happy Ensign Pulver who explodes a vengeful firecracker under the Old Man's nose when he goes too far.

Fred Clark is the Doc who can turn alky, coke, iodine and hair-tonic into emergency scotch. Nancy Berg is decorative as the Navy nurse who offers a shapely target for the boys' field glasses. And Olympics skating champ, Dick Button, is making his Broadway bow as a sex-starved seaman.

Forsythe, who used to supervise cargo loading aboard the AK 601, after taking over the assignment from Fonda, is cast as director this time. He's duplicated all the Logan shenanigans adequately.

"Mister Roberts" is one of our favorite plays. It's packed with heart, conflict and laughs. It's rough, rowdy and uproarious. It sent us out of the Alvin Theatre a few years back with a springy step. We'd had a wonderful time sympathizing with a frustrated and honest officer, and howling at the salty antics of his loyal men.

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THERE'S STILL a lot of mileage in "Mister Roberts," and you could do worse than make a voyage with him at the City Center. His ship's company is able and ingratiating. And they offer a trip to the South Pacific at prices that are right.

The New York Times

December 6, 1956

Theatre: 'Mister Roberts'

By BROOKS ATKINSON

WILL future generations think of World War II in terms of "Mister Roberts" and "South Pacific"?

It is a reasonable question. For the rowdily sentimental comedy that Joshua Logan and Thomas Heggen wrote about a Navy cargo ship in 1948 has come to the City Center, where it opened last evening, and it seems to be as good as new.

Doubtless the record should show that the company recruited for the City Center series does not equal in polish and perfection the original company, which included Henry Fonda, David Wayne and Robert Keith. But the company that John Forsythe has now directed is an excellent one—rumpled, messy, rebellious and exuberant. No one could ask for a more entertaining evening.

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It is always a surprise to find that Actors Equity can yield enough thugs to cast a play like "Mister Roberts," or a musical like "South Pacific," for that matter. Do you remember the opening scene in "Mister Roberts" when the crew comes on deck, looking like the refuse of human society? At the City Center the sailors are just as torpid, decayed and slovenly as they used to be, and their voice projection is just as illiterate. No doubt the parents of these actors are proud of them in general terms. But it must be a shock for a parent to see his boy serving the art of the drama in the squalid first act of "Mister Roberts." The rest of us are free to regard it as very funny, and the happy reverse of the usual romance of the sea.

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Of the original actors, William Harrigan is on deck again to play the crusty skipper of the "Mister Roberts" rust bucket. Mr. Harrigan's character portrait is notable because, despite its rasping temper and petty mind, it suggests a human being motivated by past experience. In that irascible scene in the captain's quarters with Mister Roberts, Mr. Harrigan gives the character personal dignity. Amid the comic whirlwind of an uproarious antic, Mr. Harrigan creates a hard-headed man.

The other parts are well played, too. Charlton Heston, rangy and deliberate, plays Mister Roberts with relish, amiability and intelligence. As the relaxed sawbones of the ship, Fred Clark gives a drily amusing performance. Orson Bean is very funny as the incompetent laundry and morale officer—hysterical, tense and shrill. Among Mr. Bean's assets as a comedian is the knack he has of speaking as though his mouth were full of loose dentures. It is an accomplishment that he should try to preserve.

The brief part of the nurse who makes one ill-advised visit to Cargo Ship AK 601 is agreeably acted by Nancy Berg with a feminine assurance that naturally arouses the admiration of an uneasy crew to say nothing of the audience.

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Although "Mister Roberts" looks and sounds like a slice of life, it is probably one of the most romantic comedies written in recent years. For it has enormous gusto. It makes the misery, boredom and coarseness of life in the services look picturesque and comic, as though the whole episode were quite a lot of fun after all. Although the style is gruff, the story is as full of sentimentality as a Valentine.

There's a lot of literal truth on the surface of "Mister Roberts." But at heart it is as romantic as a slick serial, and uproariously enjoyable. No doubt future generations doing research on the agonies of World War II will be puzzled by this impossible record. No doubt they will enjoy it, too.

NEW YORK Herald Tribune

December 6, 1956

THEATER

'Mister Roberts'

By WALTER KERR

THAT special "Mister Roberts" brand of Scotch—medicinal alcohol laced slightly with coke, iodine, and Kreml Hair Tonic—still packs a punch.

It's mellowed a bit over the years. In the revival that opened at City Center Wednesday evening there's a stronger flavor of Mister Roberts' nobility than there is of the most rambunctious, ramshackle, obstreperous crew ever to lounge through a waiting war. But those five pairs of binoculars are hoisted hilariously toward the new nurses quarters, the men are still hauled in from their liberty in dangerously swaying cargo nets, fire extinguishers do duty as cocktail shakers on the U. S. Navy's AK 601, Ensign Pulver's homemade firecracker goes up in a soapsuds roar, and nearly all of the great big laughs are still there.

Orson Bean is an enormous asset in this department. As the Pulver who has lain in his bunk underlining the choicest passages in "God's Little Acre" for a solid year, Mr. Bean has a fine, jittery holiday for himself. Blinking his eyes in perpetual disbelief, chewing his lower lip in frantic anticipation of the mayhem he is going to wreak in the Captain's quarters, teetering back and forth on his feet as he salutes the officer he hoped never to meet, he suspends this gold-bricking cartoon high in midair and keeps him dangling there amiably through storm and sentiment.

Sentiment is the note Charlton Heston has elected to strike most frequently. There is a tendency I think, to pull out the stops for the self-sacrificing Lieutenant Roberts a little too early; the adulation his crew gives him is on the thick side from the beginning. But there is swift, bitter fire in Mr. Heston's challenge to a martinet Captain he hates ("How did you get on our side?"), and the blow-off when VE-Day comes without Roberts' having seen a day of action has a healthy roundhouse swing to it.

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Back on duty in the part he played in the fabulous original is William Harrigan, beetling his caterpillar brows, letting his sour face sag in permanent displeasure, and roaring into his microphone the grisly orders for the day. Mr. Harrigan's patient, quiet, calculated venom is the stuff of which honest tyrants are made. Yet the transitions—into vigorous self-defense, and into howling pain as his beloved palm-tree goes to its watery grave—are better still, so thoroughly has Mr. Harrigan settled and stretched himself in the complex crotchets of the role.

As the easygoing Doc, Fred Clark smacks his lips judiciously over an improvised cocktail, and as the nurse who doesn't last long aboard the AK 601 Nancy Berg is something more than merely luscious. Her husky voice ripples pleasantly enough over the lines, and she is perfectly able to land one of those prolonged triple-takes for which "Mister Roberts" has always been properly famous.

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The evening sails smoothly along under John Forsythe's trim, sympathetic direction, and Frank Campanella and Jeff Harris manage to steal a few moments for themselves out of the hurly-burly of the crowd scenes.

Inevitably, "Mister Roberts" is a bit more of a memory-book than it used to be. But it's a seaworthy job—as soundly constructed as it is genuinely funny—and it may contain more first-rate sight-laughs than any other comedy of our generation.

Journal NEW YORK American

December 6, 1956

Revival Still Poignant And Full of Humor

By JOHN McCLAIN

THE PRINCIPAL INFORMATION about "Mister Roberts," which was revived last night at the City Center, is that it is still a most humorous and poignant play, and that the cast and auspices involved in this production are first class.

One always wonder how time will treat ideas springing from the "last" War, or the War before the last, but the appeal of decent affection between men is apparently eternal. This Joshua Logan-Thomas Heggen love story of a Navy officer and his men fighting the dreary non-combat War in the backwashes of the Pacific remains as compelling today as when it was unveiled almost a decade ago.

Exercise in Dramatics

It is, simply, a wonderfully skillful exercise in dramatics. We are brought to believe powerfully and emotionally in the integrity of Mister Roberts and his dedication to his subordinates. When it appears that he has let them down it is a wrench as severe as that provided by the most tragic moments in the biggest boy-girl tragedy. This is bright writing.

The City Center company that producer Jean Dalrymple has assembled for this one is generally equal to the original group. Charlton Heston has the lead role, and while he doesn't have the peculiar drawly charm of Henry Fonda, who created the part, he has an authoritative and amiable quality of his own.

William Harrigan is back in his old slot as the captain of the "bucket," and he is as reliable as ever. Orson Bean has stepped into the difficult pew occupied by David Wayne in the first Broadway company, and he gives the character a sort of offbeat aura which is enormously engaging and funny.

Nancy Is Competent

Fred Clark is excellent as the ship's doctor and Nancy Berg, the only girl in the show, is not only highly decorative but unexpectedly competent. The sailors, most of whom deserve individual mention, are uniformly capable.

The Jo Mielziner sets are there, apparently intact, and the new goat who comes aboard ship after the shore leave is better looking and more polite than the original. John Forsythe, an actor who looks like Hank Fonda, directed the show and I thought he did an outstanding job.

We all know "Mister Roberts" is a great show and this version is doing the property, no disservice.

"Night of the Auk"

The New York Times

December 4, 1956

Theatre: Science Fiction

Oboler's 'Night of the Auk' Is at Playhouse

By BROOKS ATKINSON

ARCH OBOLER is under no illusions. In "Night of the Auk," which opened at the Playhouse last evening, he says that things are going to be disastrous, given a little time.

On the "day after some tomorrow," as Mr. Oboler phrases it, rocket ship No. 1 is returning from the first successful landing on the moon, dropping through interstellar space at a speed that induces vertigo. Howard Bay, the scene designer, has filled the stage with circles, platforms, hatches, instruments and blinker lights that represent the interior of the space ship. Taken in conjunction with bells, exhaust blasts and static that represent wild nature and tame machinery, Mr. Bay's job is the most satisfying of the evening.

At least, it is something that you can lay hold of. Mr. Oboler is off there in the upper reaches, riding through the fallout of an explosive literary style, careening through a galaxy of ideas. The boys who are manning the space ship are not doing too well. They left one of their number to die on the moon, and they all seem to feel a little guilty about that oversight. On the journey back they drop a couple more through the hatch to die in the cold spaces of the planetary night, and another commits suicide magnanimously. Two are left with some remote chance of living when the rocket ship shrieks down towards the earth.

If all that sounds alarming, get set for the really bad news. While the rocket ship is still in the air nuclear bombs start popping all over the world; and, as far as one can tell by listening to the dialogue, mankind at last permanently departs from the earth. Mr. Oboler has wrapped it all up in one loquacious theatre evening.

He is a rhetorical writer. Stirring up scientific jargon with portentous ideas, he writes dialogue that is streaked with purple patches and sounds a good deal like gibberish. The tone is appropriately mournful. As, for instance, in one of many thousand remarks made by a reflective scientist. "I do not go to funerals. They are all mine," he says gravely.

As the most experienced actor in the lot, Claude Rains plays the scientist with becoming thought and sobriety, speaking the dialogue as though in a moment everything might come clear. But Christopher Plummer, an accomplished Shakesperean, also has a lot of dialogue to distribute around the stage. He plays the part of a psychotic civilian as enthusiastically as he played "Henry V" last summer.

In the other three parts, Martin Brooks, Wendell Corey and Dick York have simpler sentence structures to deal with, since the characters they are playing are less inspired. This makes everything pleasanter on both sides of the footlights.

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When "Too Late the Phalarope" opened earlier in the season, the bullpen of this newspaper charged this column with being derelict in ornithology, thus leaving the readers at loose ends. The auk to which Mr. Oboler refers in the title is doubtless the great auk, which is now extinct. Presumably "Night of the Auk" suggests that mankind will also be extinct when he starts hurling nuclear bombs. But we still have a few auks of other species paddling around the oceans. Maybe a few human beings, or close relatives of human beings, will also still be padding across the earth after Mr. Oboler has finished hurling his thunderbolts.

"NIGHT OF THE AUK"

Play by Arch Oboler; staged by Sidney Lumet; setting and lighting by Howard Bay; presented by Kermit Bloomgarden at the Playhouse, December 3, 1956. The cast:

Col. Tom Russell..Wendell Corey
Lt. Mac Hartman.....Dick York
Lewis Rohnen.....
Christopher Plummer
Doctor Bruner....Claude Rains
Lt. Jan Kephart..Martin Brooks

New York Post

December 4, 1956

By Richard Watts Jr.

Drama of a Trip From the Moon

The daring adventurers returning in their rocket ship from the first landing on the moon find themselves in something of a predicament in "Night of the Auk." Prepared to receive worldwide acclaim for their exploit, they find that atomic warfare has broken out, and mankind may have been destroyed from the face of the earth. As an added problem, the satellite upon which they planned to land has been blown up by the enemy. Furthermore, it appears that there is a psychopath or two aboard. No wonder their brows are furrowed and they tend to speak rather elaborately.

Please don't think for a moment, though, that Arch Oboler's new play, which opened last night at the Playhouse, is merely concerned with the science-fiction thrills and suspense of this hazardous situation. Mr. Oboler is preoccupied with such serious matters as the past and future of the universe, the place of science and the military mind in the world, and the possibility that man will be replaced by some other species, just as the dinosaur and the auk were. The dramatist is very much in earnest, and he obviously means for his drama to be a portent and warning to us.

The Debaters

The only trouble, and it's a very vital one, is that, in the process of trying to make his ominous points, he has become trapped in verbosity, sententiousness and frequent obscurity of word and deed. His two most articulate figures, the scientist and the soldier, sound off at great length and in what is perhaps a kind of free verse, but it seemed to me last night that they tended to confuse rather than clarify the grave problems under discussion. In the process, too, it was sometimes a little difficult to be sure about the details of what had been going on in the confusion.

It is also my impression that the psychopathic gentleman in nominal charge of the expedition becomes something of an entanglement in Mr. Oboler's narrative, even though he is vividly and explicitly played by Christopher Plummer, an immensely able young actor. Another disturbed young man, obsessed by the belief that his dead father has not received proper credit for his invention, is made clear enough, but an additional psychopath, who had died on the moon, certainly got in my way. I think I even preferred the garrulousness of the two argumentative voyagers.

Credit and Loss

Give Mr. Oboler credit for a courageous attempt to contemplate important topics in serious and dramatic fashion. Credit him, likewise, with a bold sweep of the imagination in his effort to combine space-ship melodrama with his earnest discussion of the perils of the immediate future. He certainly caused me to listen to him carefully in a desire to find out what his narrative was driving at. But I'm sure that considerably less pretentiousness in his story, a little more of the moving simplicity James Thurber got into a picture parable with a fairly similar message called "The Last Flower," would have saved him from such final ineffectiveness.

Howard Bay has provided an interesting setting of the rocket ship, and, in addition to Mr. Plummer, Claude Rains as the scientist, Wendell Corey as the officer, Martin Brooks as the youth with the father complex, and Dick York as a normal young radio operator show what good actors they are. It might, by the way, have warned Mr. Oboler if he had noticed the applause Mr. York received for the play's simplest and most direct speech. But "Night of the Auk" sacrifices imagination to verbosity.

Journal-American
December 4, 1956

Space Drama Profound But Too Complex

By JOHN McCLAIN

THERE comes the time when any drama reviewer runs up against a show that is just too much for him, and this happened to me at the opening of "Night of the Auk" at The Playhouse last night.

I do know about the Auk. It is a bird that provided feathers and food and oil and was obliterated by the hand of man some hundred years ago. There is an analogy between this bird and mankind as Arch Oboler sees it in this play, but he has succeeded in complicating the plot and the people to the point that I frankly don't know what he's talking about.

Five men are in a space ship, see? It is returning from the first successful journey to the moon and they are sort of edgy, as who wouldn't be in similar circumstances.

'Day After Some Tomorrow'

There is the dedicated nuclear scientist (Claude Rains), the Army man in command (Wendell Corey), the young man of means who financed the expedition (Christopher Plummer), the communications officer (Dick York), and another officer (Martin Brooks) whose father had originated the trip. The time is "the day after some tomorrow," the place is the interior of a rocket ship, and from this point forward I will be of little aid.

One man had been killed on the moon, we know that; then there was an incident in which Mr. Plummer somehow managed to knock off Mr. Brooks right in front of our eyes, all highly technical; then Mr. Plummer kills himself and Mr. Corey takes his remains into the escape hatch and they both disappear into the thin outer air.

All this desperation has to do with the fact that the rocket ship should have landed on a satellite for refueling, before proceeding to Earth, but the satellite has been blown up by the Russians. If you think that's tough, a global war has broken out on Earth, and from all indications nobody is left alive. Why Mr. Rains and Mr. York want to complete their journey is not fully explained.

Some Passages Poetic

The regrettable fact about all this is that Mr. Oboler is a good writer and a keen character analyst, and the actors are all excellent. He has some passages in the show that are poetic and profound; he states the case for the anti-scientists and the military; there are times when he is apparently trying to wrap up the story of the universe. If he had only chosen a less complex medium!

Howard Bay's set of the interior of the space ship is an absolute triumph. Little lights blink and beckon, all the parts are sturdy and practical. I was only concerned with poor Mr. Rains, who spent so much of the evening looking into a device that looks like a stereopticon viewer but obviously had no picture.

I started out by saying that this was one show that really had me baffled. And I guess that's the criticism: Mr. Oboler has a lot to say and he's got capable people to say it, it's wonderfully well produced, but if it seemed so confusing to me there's something wrong with it.

New York Herald Tribune
December 4, 1956

THEATER

'Night of the Auk'

By WALTER KERR

IT'S a curious thing about outer space: it's interesting only when in touch with the mainland. At least "Night of the Auk," which takes place in a rocket hurtling home from the moon, becomes suddenly impressive precisely when it is peering through periscopes or keeping fragmentary touch with the folk in Washington.

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For instance, there's a moment in the third act when the men who have so far survived this interplanetary expedition watch with dread and fascination an atomic war that has begun to convulse the earth beneath them. An atomic war, in the vision of author Arch Oboler, doesn't last long. An hour, at most. Expression drains from the men's faces. There is a long, sagging silence. Claude Rains, as the scientist of the outfit, turns wearily and almost indifferently away from his window. "Ended," he says. There's a chill in the empty, unstressed word.

There's some brief, odd excitement, too, in Wendell Corey's quick, quietly suppressed tension as he discovers that the ship's camera has unexpectedly photographed something wheeling meaninglessly in space: a cold, lifeless, doomed enemy ship that had gone out before them. And Christopher Plummer, as the moneyed egocentric who has financed the journey, finds his most rewarding bit of business in the overexhilarated, babbling and faintly fatuous report he makes by radio to the President of the United States.

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It is when "Night of the Auk" turns inward to survey its human cargo of five that Mr. Oboler's rhetorical tract loses—if I may use the word in the circumstances—momentum. In part, the slowing-down process comes from the language. So long as the men are working nervously at their instruments, there isn't room for much more than brisk, staccato commands. The minute they are relaxed and free to expostulate, though, they do just that.

Now the rhythms become—in the old-fashioned sense—poetically regular ("for they as usual will bear the brunt of probing politicians"). Phrases begin to stand on their heads ("movement accidental" for "accidental movement"). Articles tend to disappear ("the dead we left on moon"). Though the diction is up to date, with "motel" and "zipper" and "magnetic hot-foot" popping up here and there, the essential prosody is an echo, borrowed from long-lost poets, and it is dramatically lazy in a play that takes place on ("the day after some tomorrow.").

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But I don't think it's the language alone that keeps us from becoming emotionally embroiled in the personal relationships of the last five men to watch the earth turn black. Strictly speaking, nothing of e nduring importance is taking place in the rocket: these harrassed figures are simply waiting to find out what happens elsewhere. There are flare ups, to be sure: a wild attack on the communications board, a physical assault on the rich boy when an Army Colonel discovers that he has deliberately left a companion behind on the moon. But these tempers seem trivial and conventional in the larger fantasy Mr. Oboler has posed; because they haven't the stature to parallel the conflagration going on below, they leave the play with nothing to say that hasn't been said before—just as sonorously, and often more trenchantly.

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The company, as a company, is superb. Dick York grins his pumpkin grin and ferrets out a dozen successful ways of dodging this wireless operator's more troublesome flights of verse. Claude Rains, with his trick of compressing his lips together and seeming to think between phrases, gives anxious dignity to passages that might have been merely turgid. Martin Brooks suggests a seething venom that is never quite permitted to play itself out. Mr. Corey's man of hate is vigorously drawn, and Mr. Plummer's evasive hysteria helps define a shadowy role. Sidney Lumet has moved these people swiftly and efficiently about Howard Bay's enormously workable silver-and-black set.

But we are eternally sitting, as one of the characters points out, in "static judgment" on somebody else's battles.

DAILY NEWS

December 4, 1956

'Night of the Auk' Pretentious

By JOHN CHAPMAN

Arch Oboler's "Night of the Auk," which Kermit Bloomgarden presented at the Playhouse last evening, is a drama couched in hyperthyroid verse about five men in a space ship who have the earth blown out from under them by a global atomic war.

Some of this play is simply awful and some more of it is awfully simple The only message I could get from it is that Mr. Oboler writes like an educated radio writer.

The hero of last evening was Howard Bay, the scenic artist, who has devised a handsome, theatrically effective and no doubt workable rocket ship. The actors implicated were Wendell Corey, Dick York, Christopher Plummer, Claude Rains and Martin Brooks.

Mr. Oboler had better take care of himself, or one of these days he is going to write himself right smack to death.

New York World-Telegram and The Sun

December 4, 1956

The Auk Is Made Of Green Cheese

By TOM DONNELLY.

As soon as I get my landing gear adjusted I'll try to tell you about Arch Oboler's "Night of the Auk" (at the Playhouse).

Mr. Oboler's drama unfolds on "a rocket ship in interstellar space returning from the first successful landing on the moon."

I am positive about the statement directly above, because it is printed in legible type in the program. From here on out, I'm not guaranteeing a thing.

There are five men aboard the rocket ship, and they speak an alarming language called "Arch Oboler Verse."

One of the men gets himself a cup of coffee and observes:

"Remember how the experts said
"We'd sip liquid through
"Extended straws?"

Another chap says, after a moment of crisis:

"Our blood stream's thick
"With chemicals of shock."

Higher Verbal Flights.

Well, I absorbed these specimens readily enough, but I confess that I got very nervous when the rocket men began to make higher verbal flights, as in:

"Lose your amazing tensions, lieutenant,
"I, too, have father-bonds."

I kept wishing that these space adventures would start talking like ordinary earthlings, but they never did, and the result was that even when they were engaged in lively pursuits like murder and mayhem I invariably found myself distracted by the effort involved in deciphering the speeches accompanying the action. ("Have we proven that death, too, rides an ellipsoid?")

Atomic War.

As I get it, the five have successfully planted the U.S. flag on the moon ("that piece of gamma-soaked real estate"), but on their way back to the earth their leader, a psycopathic type, insists on indulging in a person-to-person broadcast with the President, who is sitting in the White House, little dreaming that he should have kept his inter-com shut. Because, you see, when the agents of a mighty foreign power hear the leader of the rocket expedition boasting about his conquest of the moon, why, the representatives of that foreign power get so upset that they unleash an atomic war.

So there we are, up in a rocket heading towards an earth reeking with atomic fission. At this point in Mr. Oboler's play, only two of the original five moon explorers remain, the others having been disposed of by various means, ranging from hocus-pocus with a switch that shouldn't have been turned on, to simple suicide. The two survivors decide to land on earth.

Now why, you will want to know, would these two men want to land on an earth which has just been atomized? That's precisely the query I put to a representative of the management I chanced to meet in the lobby. The obliging fellow explained that even if the earth has been atomized, presumably there will be something left of it, and those two survivors plan to look for a nonradioactive patch and start a new civilization from scratch. My informant disappeared down an alley before I could ask him the next question: "What if there aren't any nonradioactive girls in that patch?"

Solemn Drama.

For some time now I have had a notion that some of the materials being exploited by the science fiction writers might be amusingly transferred to the stage, but I scarcely envisioned anything as solemn as "Night of the Auk" stemming from this popular literary trend.

Mr. Oboler's play has received the best of care. All the actors (Claude Rains, Wendell Corey, Christopher Plummer, Dick York and Martin Brooks) are excellent.

Howard Bay's setting, which suggests an operating room suitable for the performing of appendectomies on robots, is a fascinating creation.

Every now and then, when the gadgets light up in sinister shades and hideous grinding noises rend the air, "Night of the Auk" seems ready to fly right, but Mr. Oboler persists in slowing things down with some cosmic question he can't begin to answer.

"Night of the Auk" —*continued*

Daily Mirror

December 4, 1956

Robert Coleman's THEATRE:

'Night of the Auk' A Gloomy Melodrama

• Arch Oboler pens pessimistic prediction of earth's doom.

Man has fashioned a veritable Pandora's Box for himself, argues Arch Oboler in "Night of the Auk," and is opening it with disastrous results. Science has outstripped humanity, and our world faces extinction. Like the dinosaur or the great auk.

After the dropping of the atom bomb on Hiroshima, Norman Cousins made similar dire predictions. They evidently inspired Oboler's play, for it is dedicated to him. Where Cousins used prose to present these ideas, Oboler has turned to a kind of stilted blank verse.

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HE MAKES HIS parable in a science-fiction melodrama. A space ship, mainned by American naval personnel, under civilian sponsorship, reaches the moon. And, while returning to earth, pulls the trigger for an intercontinental, nuclear-fission war that spells doom to life as we know it.

The civilian head of the expedition boasts by radio, in flight, that the U. S. has staked out a vast spatial territory for itself. A rival power thereupon launches its missiles, and brings swift and lethal retaliation. The irony of it is that the Major who first stepped onto the moon was pushed onto it by an ambitious newspaperman.

Oboler indicts scientists, statesmen, capitalists, revolutionaries, philosophers and ordinary people for their misuse of nature's secrets. We're all wrong, he contends, and almost total annihilation faces us. But the ocean will cleanse itself, and produce another species to take over the world and make it a happier place.

"Night of the Auk" is a pessimistic, soap-boxy editorial by a poet, rather than drama for actors to act. For all its theatrical trappings, it remains as static as the static that often comes over its radio receivers. Yet producer Kermit Bloomgarden has engaged some of our top players for it.

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CHRISTOPHER PLUMMER, a fine young actor with an admirable flair for poetic speech, stands out as the glory-bent patron of the venture who cracks up wretchedly when faced with death and defeat. The veteran Claude Rains also is eloquent as the compassionate disillusioned scientific member of the crew.

Wendell Corey, Dick York and Martin Brooks are excellent as the Navy boys aboard. Sidney Lumet has sought to give the verbose piece some pace, while Howard Bay has designed pseudo-scientific gimmicks that would delight rocket-minded kids unable to comprehend Oboler's flowery wordage.

"Night of the Auk" has moments of power. During the last stanza, we saw one woman dabbing her eyes and heard another sobbing hysterically. But the Playhouse would have been a pleasanter and more rewarding place Monday evening, as far as we are concerned, if Plummer and Rains had been reading the inspired verse of Shakespeare. And they have the gift for it.

"Candide"

DAILY NEWS

December 3, 1956

'Candide' an Artistic Triumph; Bernstein's Score Magnificent

By JOHN CHAPMAN

The opening at the Martin Beck of Leonard Bernstein's "Candide" Saturday evening was a truly notable event in the musical theatre. Sixty seconds after conductor Samuel Krachmalnick brought down his baton for the overture, one sensed that here was going to be an evening of uncommon quality.

It developed into an artistic triumph — the best light opera, I think, since Richard Strauss wrote "Der Rosenkavalier" in 1911. It is a great contribution to the richness of the American musical comedy stage. Many artists of many skills have had a hand in fashioning "Candide," but it is Bernstein's profoundly sophisticated and witty score which puts it in a class by itself on Broadway. Now all I can hope is that Broadway, which is unpredictable and which does not always like to be jogged out of its routine, will cherish it as it should be cherished.

Voltaire's Story

The basis is the ironic novel Voltaire wrote in 1763, chronicling the wide-world search by Candide for a land of human happiness in this "best of all possible worlds"—and his search, too, for Cunegonde, his lady love, who somehow is always vanishing or getting abducted. From this classic comedy Lillian Hellman has fashioned a strong, clear and humorous libretto.

The lyrics—some of which have punch, others, beauty—have been written by Richard Wilbur, Dorothy Parker and the late John Latouche. The settings, by Oliver Smith, have unusual mobility and a reposeful loveliness, and Irene Sharaff's costumes are a dazzling series as Candide sets about his wanderings— the best of them being the chocolate brown investiture of the South American scenes. And director Tyrone Guthrie has kept this very big production well in hand—and with a properly light touch.

The cast has been ideally chosen. The key is set by Max Adrian's dual-role performance of Dr. Pangloss, the optimistic philosopher, and Martin, the embittered street-sweeper. His incisiveness makes him the perfect spokesman for Voltaire. As Cunegonde, Barbara Cook does an admirable job of singing and acting, matching the humor of Bernstein's music with an inner wit of her own.

"CANDIDE"

Comic operetta based on Voltaire's satire, book by Lillian Hellman, score by Leonard Bernstein, lyrics by Richard Wilbur, other lyrics by John Latouche and Dorothy Parker; scenery by Oliver Smith; costumes by Irene Sharaff; lighting by Paul Morrison; staged by Tyrone Guthrie, assisted by Tom Brown; presented by Ethel Linder Reiner in association with Lester Osterman Jr. at the Martin Beck Theatre, December 1, 1956. The cast:

Dr. Pangloss and Martin.... Max Adrian
Cunegonde..... Barbara Cook
Candide..... Robert Rounseville
Old Lady..... Irra Petina

Also included in the cast: Robert Mesrobian, Louis Edmonds, Conrad Bain, Norman Roland, Boris Aplon, Doris Okerson, Margaret Roy, Tony Drake, Robert Rue, Robert Barry, Maria Novotna, William Chapman, Charles Aschmann, Robert Cosden, Thomas Pyle, Maud Scheerer, Joseph Bernard, Dorothy Krebill, William Olvis and George Blackwell.

Time of Her Life

In the role of Candide—who in character is a kind of 18th Century Rafe Rackstraw—is Robert

Rounseville, a fine tenor and a good actor. Irra Petina has the time of her life as Cunegonde's nurse and companion—the one who, in the end, so to speak, loses part of her derriere and thus becomes unbalanced. This is a richly funny performance. Other excellent singers or players in the big company are Boris Aplon, William Olvis, William Chapman, Louis Edmonds, Joseph Bernard and Margot Moser.

Bernstein has put an enormous amount of music, and a great variety of it, into his score. The comic highlight is his witty burlesque of a coloratura aria in which Miss Cook exults, "Glitter and Be Gay." There are trios, quartets, waltzes, ballads, a wonderful tango, hornpipes and many other exciting offerings. Generally speaking, the music achieves an 18th entury effect with remarkably modern methods. It is a work of genius.

New York World-Telegram and The Sun

December 3, 1956

Best Musical News of Year Is Found in New 'Candide'

By TOM DONNELLY.

I am happy to take an optimistic view of "Candide" (at the Martin Beck). True, this comic operetta derived from Voltaire doesn't hang together very well, but the bits and pieces of it are invariably fascinating, and the whole business is charged with the excitement that arises when gifted artists come close to achieving the all-but-impossible.

To get the big news out in a hurry, Leonard Bernstein's music is lush, lovely, and electric. When it isn't voluptuous as velvet, it is as frostily pretty as a diamond bell. It is easily the best score Mr. Bernstein has written for the theater. To go a step further, it is one of the most attractive scores anyone has written for the theater.

Now to the book. Lillian Hellman's decision to convert "Candide" into a musical was certainly a flight of reckless daring. Only Burton's "The Anatomy of Melancholy" could conceivably offer more problems. Voltaire's original, after all, alternates metaphysical discussions with long monologues wherein the principal characters recite impossible adventures: They are murdered, beaten, tortured, and skinned, but somehow they miraculously survive and come back for more, like the indestructible creatures of the animated cartoons of our own day.

Candide's Conclusion.

Pangloss, the philosopher and tutor of Candide, bleats eternally that all is for the best in the best of all possible worlds. If we didn't have wars, we couldn't appreciate peace. Therefore, man should submit to the horrors of war. "Optimism" is thus equated with a callous acceptance of evil, and a hopeless surrender to it. After taking an anguished look at the barbarous universe surrounding him, Candide is driven to conclude that the only real hope for man lies in an avoidance of philosophical speculation and a reliance on hard work to banish the three great evils: Boredom, vice and poverty.

It is scarcely surprising that Miss Hellman hasn't really succeeded in whipping these unyielding materials into a readily comprehensive shape.

She has followed three main lines. She has retained the basic scheme of following Candide around the world in 80 days of violence, treachery, and disillusionment. She has bedecked the works with contemporary witticisms ranging from a play-on: "You never had it so good!" to a diatribe against the hollow pretensions of "Western Liberalism." (These jokes are the least rewarding feature of the evening.) Finally, she has done a reconstruction job on Voltaire's pale heroine, Cunegonde, and transformed that minor figure into a roistering, gimlet-eyed little adventuress.

Fine Sardonic Flashes.

If Miss Hellman's book tends to be vague and meandering, I can't find it in my heart to blame her a particle, not even for the large vacuum which turns up in the second act. She has given us some fine sardonic flashes ("White slaves are impractical, they show the dirt") and, above all, she has provided the basis for an almost continuously stimulating show.

As Candide crosses the borders of Westphalia, Lisbon, Paris, and Buenos Aires, the stage blazes up in a dream of dazzling scenic effect. Chandeliers and towers float majestically through the air, and great gauzy painted expanses frame the sumptuously costumed revelers, victims, and scoundrels. (Sets by Oliver Smith, costumes by Irene Sharaff; both of them geniuses.)

The performance leaves nothing to be desired, in either the singing or acting departments. Robert Rounseville, as Candide; Barbara Cook, as Cunegonde; Irra Petina, as an old scapegrace, and William Olvis as the governor of Buenos Aires, pour forth golden tones with prodigal abandon, and they manage to be very funny besides. Max Adrian gives an immensely stylish account of himself in two roles: As Dr. Pangloss, and as that considerably less amiable debater, Martin.

Interpolated Burlesque.

Perhaps the liveliest aspect of this new operetta is its interpolated burlesque of the conventions of yesterday's operetta. Miss Cook tears down the house with a coloratura attack on a song called "Glitter and Be Gay," lustily achieving the trill beyond the trill beyond the trill, and, when hero and heroine are reunited after one of many catastrophes, they gargle a duet ("You Were Dead, You Know, but Love Will find a Way") which is not only a neat variation on Voltaire, but a dissection of Sigmund Romberg.

The lyrics, attributed principally to Richard Wilbur, with an assist from Dorothy Parker and John LaTouche, are witty and graceful, neat complements to Mr. Bernstein's ravishing score. Tyrone Guthrie's overall direction is capital.

"Candide" may be an example of reach exceeding grasp, but what a reach is there!

New York Post

December 3, 1956

By Richard Watts Jr.

Voltaire's 'Candide' as an Operetta

To start with a warning, readers who expect an unequivocal yes or no from a reviewer are going to be exasperated by this notice of the operetta based on Voltaire's "Candide," which opened Saturday night at the Martin Beck. For although I'm afraid the final effect of this adventurous new theatrical work is one of disappointment, there is so much that is brilliant about it, so much in the way of musical excellence, visual beauty, grace of style and boldness of design, that it deserves attention and respect from playgoers who are interested in artistic enterprise.

The main success of this "Candide" lies in its score. Leonard Bernstein's music certainly makes no concessions to easy popularity. It is sardonic, mocking, satirical and perhaps a little cold; in brief, it captures the ironic mood and spirit of Voltaire with distinction and dramatic effectiveness. Although it has something of the quality of Sir Arthur Sullivan, it is not of the sort I am happiest in discussing. The music critics would appreciate it more intelligently. But I know that "Candide" is delightful throughout the course of its musical numbers.

Scenic Tour

It is beautiful to look at, too. Being an episodic narrative, "Candide" whisks its audience through Westphalia, Lisbon, Paris, Buenos Aires and Venice and across the high seas, and Oliver Smith's lovely sets carry it along with vividness, humor, imagination and resourcefulness. Indeed, what dynamic quality the new operetta possesses is the result of the ingenuity by which Mr. Smith's sets move and become part of the show. And Irene Sharaff's colorful costumes are not only handsome but have a humor of their own. For sheer decorativeness, the production is a notable one.

Nor can there be anything save praise for the acting and singing. The cast of "Candide" is admirably equipped in both respects. Playing both Dr. Pangloss, the apostle of optimism, and Martin, who is here the disciple of pessimism, Max Adrian, an English actor unfamiliar in this country, differentiates between the two men admirably. Barbara Cook is enchanting as the guileful ingenue, Cunegonde, and reveals an unexpectedly fine singing voice, while Robert Rounseville, as Candide, and Irra Petina, as the heroine's sly duenna, are of great help to the evening.

Matter of Libretto

With so much that is distinguished about it, why is it that the final impression left by "Candide" is disturbing rather than satisfying? I fear that, in the last analysis, it is because Lillian Hellman has not been able to cope properly with the tremendous problem of reducing Voltaire's savage and freewheeling satire at the expense of mankind to effective dramatic terms. At best, it would be an enormously difficult task to perform; possibly even an impossible one. But the surprising thing, in view of Miss Hellman's powers, is that so little of the bite and pungency are left.

These important qualities are assuredly not completely lacking. They are present in Mr. Bernstein's score, and in Mr. Adrian's dual portrayal. They are also often present in the lyrics, which are the work of Richard Wilbur, with aid from Dorothy Parker and the late John Latouche. But, in general, the libretto, while it sticks with much fidelity to the Voltaire outline, is not satirically powerful or dramatically striking. There is more of his letter than of his spirit. But there should be no denying the musical and visual eminence of a brave adventure in operetta.

Journal-American

December 3, 1956

Fine, Bright— But Operetta Lacks Spark

By JOHN McCLAIN

THIS NEW Lillian Hellman-Leonard Bernstein show, "Candide," which opened at the Martin Beck Saturday night, is a tough one to call. Here they have taken a satire by Voltaire, a most tenuous idea in itself dealing with the general perversity of life, and transposed it into an operetta. It is even more than an operetta, it is a sort of caricature of an opera.

All that is simply fine. It is a thoughtful production and Miss Hellman's book is bright; so is the Bernstein music, and the lyrics by Richard Wilbur. And it is hard to find fault with the services of Max Adrian, Robert Rounseville, Barbara Cook and Irra Petina in the cast. But somewhere it misses; it just doesn't create that electricity that sparks a hit.

The sets are manifold and magnificent; the authors skillfully kid the bloomers off the pattern of long-haired musical efforts, but they fail, unfortunately, to make us care very much what happens to anybody.

There is an attractive girl and a handsome boy, and there is a delightful old man and an amusing old lady; all these people go half the way around the world, dancing and singing like mad, but we are singularly unmoved.

All Competent

They give us a variety of numbers, en route, all performed with competence. You do not need to be told that Irra Petina is a former Metropolitan singer, or that Rounseville and Barbara Cook have been handling these singing roles, with distinction, in a long series of musicals. Or that Adrian is an accomplished performer.

So we will delight in such numbers as "Oh, Happy We", "It Must Be So", "It Must Be Me", "My Love", "Eldorado", "What's the Use?" and "Make Our Garden Grow." These and other features are presented with importance and taste, and the mood of the whole evening is always respectful to the musical side.

Which may be the trouble, after all. However simplified, we are all spending about three hours figuring how this boy is going to get this girl, and there comes a time when we just don't care. You've got to have heart, in the words of the familiar song, and I thought it was missing.

Remarkable Sets

This coronary deficiency might be solved by a more exhaustive examination of the characters involved. We really don't know them.

Otherwise, I thought Oliver Smith did a remarkable job with the sets, imaginative and exciting; and I believe Tyrone Guthrie's direction was never intrusive, always sure. There is a credit here in the playbill saying that the hair styles are by Ronald de Mann, and I wish to state that I have never seen more stylish hair.

"Candide" is ambitious and brilliant, and it is loaded with talent. Sorry it didn't quite score.

Daily Mirror

December 3, 1956

Robert Coleman's THEATRE:

Musical 'Candide' Is Distinguished Work

• Offering at Martin Beck a cynical, colorful near-opera. Not for softies.

Gottfried Wilhelm von Leibnitz, philosopher and mathematician, was quite a guy. He invented differential and integral calculus to plague students, and provoked Voltaire into penning "Candide." When the German proclaimed that "all is for the best in this best of all possible worlds," the sarcastic Frenchman set out to disprove it.

Under the tutelage of the idealistic Dr. Pangloss, young Candide becomes an optimist. Pangloss, of course, was Leibnitz. But after Candide has been beaten, tortured and cheated in various parts of the world, he begins to have his doubts. Having fallen in love with the beautiful Cunegonde, he loses her repeatedly throughout his travels, only to marry her when she's grown old and ugly.

Lillian Hellman, Leonard Bernstein and Richard Wilbur have turned the Voltaire satire into a colorful and cynical musical. The Hellman libretto is fairly true to the original. The Wilbur lyrics, with assists from John Latouche and Dorothy Parker, have bite. And the score by Bernstein is alternately tuneful and astringent, almost of operatic calibre.

"Candide" is a distinguished work. Faults it does have, but it towers head and shoulders above most of the song-and-dancers you'll get this or any other season. It has wry humor, mannered grace and marvelous music.

IT TOOK SOMEONE with the courage and dedication of Ethel Linder Reiner to mount a musical in which boy loses girl when she's a beaut, and gets girl when she's a hag. Mrs. Reiner righteously shuns shoddy, and gambles fortunes on quality.

And it cost a fortune to give the Martin Beck Theatre its new tenant. Oliver Smith's sets are stunning, and the Irene Sharaff costumes breath-taking. You can't provide such sumptuousness on peanuts. Tyrone Guthrie has directed the picaresque piece robustiously.

Max Adrian has come from London to impersonate Dr. Pangloss. Why this wonderful actor hasn't been borrowed from our British cousins before is a mystery to us. Robert Rounseville, of the resonant tenor, and Barbara Cook, of the trick coloratura, are a perfect Candide and Cunegonde. And Irra Petina bestows her magnetic personality and facile voice on the role of a worldly, knowing old sharper.

IF YOU'RE ON THE TOWN, in search of fun and frolic, "Candide" is not your dish. Rather, it's for those who don't demand lacy icing on their entertainment cake, who can stand a lot of bitter with a little sweet. It's not for softies, but for the hardy who can tear the tinsel off reality and take it in stride.

NEW YORK **Herald Tribune**

December 3, 1956

THEATER

'Candide'

By WALTER KERR

THREE of the most talented people our theater possesses—Lillian Hellman, Leonard Bernstein, Tyrone Guthrie—have joined hands to transform Voltaire's "Candide" into a really spectacular disaster.

Who is mostly responsible for the great ghostly wreck that sails like a Flying Dutchman across the fogbound stage of the Martin Beck? That would be hard to say, the honors are so evenly distributed.

• • •

As librettist of this "comic operetta" Miss Hellman has looked at the ingenious Doctor Pangloss' "best of all possible worlds" and found in it nothing to laugh at. Innocent Candide does start out to find goodness and honesty in the glorious universe that promises so much. He does discover all the wickedness that passes for virtue, and all the virtue that is denounced as wickedness. He does finally go back to cultivate his own little garden as best he can. And he does it, step by step and hour by hour, with the tread of Oedipus lurching out of Thebes.

• • •

Satire, as I understand it, is a matter of humor—partly of good humor, partly of snappish wit. Miss Hellman's attack on it is academic, blunt and barefaced. Candide, having been denied food by everyone except an animal in chains (get it?), finally knocks on a friendly door.

"Oh, thank you," he says as something is put in his hand. "You're a Christian."

"What do you mean?" roars the donor—"I'm an atheist."

"What's that?"

"Oh, never mind. Go your way. God bless you."

• • •

Irony is thumped out with a crushing hand, nobility is underscored by bewildering tears (Max Adrian, as Doctor Pangloss, did really seem to be crying onstage at the opening Saturday night, for reasons which shall forever remain his secret). Nowhere in all the garlanded banquetry, the wild Parisian waltzing, the South American veranda-lolling, the frenzied double-hanging that winds up a Portuguese bacchanal are we permitted to take a moment's shrewd delight in the sly thrust, the mockery that amuses even as it kills, the tell-tale truth that grins and gleams behind a sombre mask.

• • •

Nor has director Guthrie found a point of vantage from which he can throw sharp illumination on the muddle of shipwrecks, slave-marts, brothels, and gambling dens that pass, through the courtesy of designer Oliver Smith, in sluggish array. Mr. Guthrie's hand is, for once, unsure: ensemble songs are sung with a vote of no confidence, cluttered crowds trample one another as they make for the eighteenth-century portals, whole scenes are hustled into view and out again without comic—or even dramatic—definition. An actor hanging by his neck from a gibbet must find his own way to get off stage.

• • •

Once the air has cleared a bit, I imagine Mr. Bernstein will come off best, if there is a best to be salvaged from this singularly ill-conceived venture. For a great part of the evening Mr. Bernstein is composing trilling little pastiches that are surely meant as wry comments on music, if not manners. He is trapped, though, by lyrics which have no purposeful edge and therefore cannot join him in his jests. (A bit in which reunited lovers sing "Dearest, how can this be so—you were dead, you know" is perhaps an exception to this.) As the evening progresses, however, Mr. Bernstein seems to take more freedom, and an exultant "Eldorado" and a lilting "What's the Use?" achieve both stature and melodic sparkle at the same happy time.

Irra Petina, as a highly born duenna who was reduced very early, manages to make her claim that she's "Easily Assimilated" jovially effective because, with all the huffing and chin-hoisting she's asked to do, she still has an irresistible determination to entertain somebody. Barbara Cook's most cheerful moment comes in a diamond-studded aria called "Glitter and Be Gay," Robert Rounseville does what he can with a plaintive "It Must Be So," and Max Adrian flashes his very white teeth in the double roles of optimist and pessimist.

But pessimism is the order of the evening.